

# DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Tuesday, October 9, 2001

## Legislative Auditor Report

By Richard Anderson

Sorry this is such a long article, but because the Legislative Audit information is of importance to all of us (and so well done), I wanted to give you an overview of the 28-page report and our nine-page response. If you possibly can, please take time to read this summary. The uncondensed versions are available in your regions.

The Office of Legislative Audit completed their annual review of the Division and the Office of Services Review (OSR) and submitted their report to the legislative committee on September 17, 2001. This audit provides an annual review of referrals to the Division and a review of the OSR process for assessing the progress of the Division on the Milestone Plan items that they evaluate. The Office of Legislative Audit has some leeway in what they select to specifically review each year. Legislators' interests or concerns direct the areas of focus. This year, in addition to looking at referrals and OSR assessments, they reviewed the removal process, worker training requirements, and the qualitative review tool. Of special note, the review reflected the perceptions, concerns, and opinions of our front-line staff. We praised the auditors for being a voice for those that do the work they reviewed. Your voices were heard by the auditors and by us, your administration.

I will give a summary and welcome you to obtain more details from your regional administration, if interested. The recommendations of the audit, which we have concurred with and will be addressing, are listed below. I have given some explanation and our plans in the italicized comments after each recommendation. We have already begun work on addressing these recommendations. We need your help in designing the improvements.

1. "We recommend that OSR provide caseworkers with the results of the scored cases from the case process review as soon as OSR has completed the scoring and give the caseworkers an opportunity to respond."

*This recommendation is strongly Practice Model principled! OSR has agreed to make this change. They will offer each caseworker the opportunity to be involved in the review. This allows for both the caseworker and the reviewer to learn more from the process, allowing for more accuracy of the review and for immediate learning opportunities for the caseworker. This is no way depletes the objectivity of the review, as the data is pulled from the SAFE system.*

2. "We recommend that OSR review the structure of the case process review instrument and design the questions and scoring guidelines to accurately reflect the purpose of the review."

*The auditors' concerns were focused on the need to have reviews that promote improved practice, and that, since the reviews did not seem to be improving, OSR needed to evaluate that facet of the case process review.*

*We agree with OSR that the case process reviews have been in the background, while the qualitative case reviews received major focus from the Division. We are considering, with our court monitor, Paul Vincent, combining part of the case process review with the qualitative case review. By combining these reviews, at some level, we may have better research into finding the key components to highly effective work with families, while at the same time discovering what efforts do not produce the desired outcomes. This would lend itself to focusing on the most effective work and removing unnecessary or ineffective activities.*

3. "We recommend that DCFS conduct a workload analysis to determine the appropriate workload standards for the caseworkers and review the needed number of child visits by caseworkers."

*The auditors concluded that foster care workers have very high workloads. I commend them for making a distinction between caseloads and workloads. We have relatively low caseloads when compared nationally, but we do seem to have higher expectations of workload. We need a way to provide good information as to workload. As I read this recommendation, I remembered an e-mail that I received last year that asked if there was any filtering system at the state office to look at how much is being asked of front-line staff and supervisors. We need this tool. We have already explored this recommendation with the Child Welfare League of America and others and have yet to find a good tool for measuring workload. This must be done, and we will find a way to do it (just not quite sure how yet). We welcome your ideas and suggestions.*

*Another part of this recommendation was for us to look into decreasing the number of monthly visits to each foster child. We are discussing this with the court monitor, as this is a requirement of the Milestone Plan. We are developing a proposal for the monitor to review that will request a decrease in this requirement for the caseworker, while at the same time ensure safety for children. This may mean that child and family teams will provide a way to see that we are attending to children's well-being while in our care.*

4. "We recommend that DCFS monitor removals by caseworker and investigate the reasons some workers have very high or low removal rates."

*This recommendation is just good administrative practice. We will be designing a system for reviewing higher and lower removal rates so that we will know, at any point in time, what accounts for the differences from worker to worker of those at either extreme. We realize that this is often either the nature of the referrals or the assignments that individual workers receive due to experience or special expertise of the worker.*

5. "We recommend that DCFS develop a state-wide, uniform system to monitor caseworker training to ensure that caseworkers receive adequate training."

- Case process reviews need to involve the worker. This allows for both the reviewer and the worker to learn more. Workers can provide clarification of their work as well as assist reviewers in finding information. The reviewer can provide information to the worker on areas of misunderstanding about policy, documentation, etc.

*OSR has agreed to offer to have the worker involved in the case process reviews.*

- We need to provide a system for reviewing removal rates by worker, although the process of determining removals was considered “reasonable.”
- Training for new employees needs to be completed as required before assuming full assignments for the position and statewide tracking of training needs to be accomplished.

*The recent hiring of six new training managers in the Division was an attempt, even before the audit, to attend to this concern. This effort, in addition to the current building block that has been proposed for 37 trainee positions for the Division, could move this effort along nicely. The tracking of training has been an off-and-on dilemma that we intend to remedy shortly. We have relied on many different systems that have each failed us. We will have our system in place after the first of the year.*

Overall, the audit was helpful in defining in an objective way some of the current important challenges in our work. We appreciate the good work being done, and would welcome your insight and ideas as we work together toward solutions.

## Federal Review of SAFE

*By Jack Green*

During the week of September 4-7, we had three staff from the Washington, D.C. Agency for Children (ACF) and three from the Denver Regional Office of ACF review our SAFE system. While here, the reviewers met with DCFS staff from offices in the Northern and Salt Lake Valley Regions and with other agencies who utilize SAFE. In addition, the SAFE staff provided a day-and-a-half overview of the system and spent a day answering detailed questions regarding the system.

On September 20 we participated in a video exit conference with the Washington Office. They reported how impressed they were with the overall capacity and ease of use of SAFE when compared to other states. During the overview, we kept hearing remarks like "Cool!" and "Can we get other states to do this?" The reviewers expressed their appreciation for the cordial and frank discussions and their knowledge of SAFE and, more specifically, for workers' evident concern for the safety and welfare of the children and family we serve. **Thanks for being so great!!**

SAFE is a "work in process" and will continue to be until it becomes easier to use and secondary to a caseworker's daily activity. We on the SAFE staff appreciate your patience with us and your continued suggestions for improvements to the system.

**For general comments, suggestions, or questions about the weekly updates, e-mail Carol Miller or call 801-538-4451.**

**For questions about policy or rules,  
e-mail Steve Bradford or call 801-538-8210.**

**For questions about SAFE,  
call the SAFE Help Desk at 801-538-4141.**